

Animation and Memory

In Pixar's *Inside Out* (Docter and Del Carmen, 2015), Joy and Sadness navigate around their host Riley's long-term memory where coloured orbs representing different events in her past are stored on shelves. The film imagines memory as fixed content that can be recalled as needed. However, developments in the interdisciplinary field of memory studies now consider memory to be much more complex than this. Like the term realism discussed elsewhere in this volume, memory is a slippery thing – it is better understood as always in a state of becoming, as related to the present more than the past, and as a creative, networked process rather than as a simple transmission of historical data. After introducing some of the broad ideas related to contemporary studies of media and memory, this chapter focuses on the ways in which we can remember the past through and with animation, and how the form can represent memory, concentrating particularly on issues of trauma and witnessing, collective memory and identity, and nostalgia.

Understanding Memory

Memory is a familiar term, yet it can be difficult to define without confusing it with the past – events that have happened – and History – the telling of such events. If History (and I use the capital H here purposely to refer to the practice of historians) is the construction of narratives of the past following a cause and effect logic, often detailed with empirical data, then memory refers to our experience of the past in the present. Memory highlights the fragmentary nature of temporality, and refers to our bodily and sensual relations to events

that have previously happened. Memory is incomplete, inaccurate, messy and subjective. It is not fixed, but rather it is fluid. Memory is a creation that is never complete and involves an assemblage or network of actors – human and non-human – contributing to its continuous development (Garde-Hansen, Hoskins and Reading 2012: 7). Memory is something felt and is often shared and developed with others. Although, when we colloquially use the word ‘memory’ we tend to mean the things we personally remember, the concept ‘memory’ encapsulates both personal, collective and collaborative experiences with the past, and how these relate to each other. It is important to remember that ‘the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present’ (Halbwachs 1992: 40). Thus, in studying memory, we come to understand as much about the current situation as we do about the events being remembered.

Media, such as animation, play an important role in the creation of memories today as our engagement with the past is extensively mediated (Garde-Hansen 2011, van Dijck 2007). Marshall McLuhan’s seminal book *Understanding Media* (1964) introduced the idea that media might be able to extend human experience. Following such thinking in relation to memory, Alison Landsberg (2004) argues that films can serve as prosthetics, encouraging us to feel emotionally and bodily engaged with a past we neither witnessed nor know much about. Landsberg here emphasises the assemblage nature of memory (that it involves the interaction of organic and inorganic agents in its creation (Garde-Hansen, Hoskins, Reading 2012: 11) as media can inspire the spectator to remember. Memory is not solely situated within our minds; rather it emerges through social collaborations. Given that animation often foregrounds the subjective – with its handmade quality and ability to resist photographic traditions of representation– the form can help encourage the types of affective responses to historical events that we tend to define as memory.

Memory and Animation

Animation can highlight issues related to memory in many ways. Firstly, the creativity and imagination that inform memory are often highlighted in animated works, particularly when their frame-by-frame production is emphasised, such as with stop-motion and pixilation films, or when the physical imprint of the animators is materialised onscreen, such as in the finger marks on the surfaces of clay figures. Film phenomenologist Jennifer M. Barker, in her analysis of the Quay Brothers' *Street of Crocodiles* (1986), argues that the foregrounding of the creative process in stop-motion films is indicative of play (2009: 130-32). Pixar's first feature film *Toy Story* (Lasseter, 1996) also highlights animation's relationship to play, despite its use of digital animation rather than stop-motion as we watch the adventures of Andy's toys when they come alive, and follow the narrative of Woody, an old toy, with whom Andy no longer wants to play when he receives his new Buzz Lightyear figure. The emphasis on play in *Toy Story*, as in many animations, is shrouded in nostalgia for childhood. Nostalgia is a particular feeling about the past discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Secondly, animation particularly foregrounds embodiment. Even if we do not see the animator's hands moving objects onscreen, we are aware of the human agency acting between frames, which enables the creation of movement. Material, non-human forms in animations can also provoke the spectator to feel bodily sensations in reaction to historical events. For example, in the Estonian short *Body Memory* (*Keha mälu*, Pikkov, 2011) – about the deportation of Estonians by Soviet officials – objects encourage deep visceral affect for the audience. The film includes anthropomorphic figures, which are made of twine, placed inside a model of a cattle car. The figures are seen being violently jerked around until they are untangled and destroyed. Barker claims that when film draws attention to a sense of corporal discontinuity, such as with stop-motion, this can evoke feelings of bodily

vulnerability within the spectator because it encourages them to recognise that the unity of the film – its body – is actually constructed of fragile, individual elements and the failure of any of these could threaten the existence of the whole (2009: 21). In *Body Memory*, such affect is not only suggested through the staccato temporality of the film, but also through the unravelling and metamorphosis of the twine figures, which encourage us to consider how our own body could be torn to pieces or changed by external forces. Such a sensation can enable the tragic past of Soviet deportations to resonate deep within the spectator's body and thus it is through an embodied relationship with the animation that they can become invested in remembering this past.

Thirdly, animation's ability to emphasise subjective reality (Wells 1998: 27) enables it to explore the sensual responses of people to historical events rather than to show them photographically. Animation has long been interested in depicting the impossible, and the embodied, fluid experience of memory is certainly something that a photograph or live-action film cannot satisfactorily depict. This is particularly significant when animations deal with events that are questionably real. For example, Paul Vester's *Abductees* (1994) uses animated drawings to accompany the vocal testimony of individuals who describe their experiences of being abducted by aliens. The artwork attempts to both illustrate the interviewees' memories and to question the reliability of subjective narratives of the past with interjections of iconic fantasy images, such as Bambi. This approach is also particularly useful for confronting trauma.

Traumatic Memory

'A traumatic event is often understood as an aporia in subjective experience and also for the possibilities of representation' (Honess Roe 2013: 156), thus whilst photographic-based live-

action images might have difficulties engaging with trauma through traditional narratives, animation can offer an aesthetic response (Ibid). Following the psychoanalytical work of Sigmund Freud, trauma theorist Cathy Caruth defines trauma as a 'double wound' (1996: 3). By this she means that it is a 'breach in the mind's experience of time, self and the world' and that as it reappears in flashbacks to the survivor, trauma is always 'experienced too soon' and 'too unexpectedly to be fully known' (1996: 4). Therefore, trauma causes the survivor of a horrific experience to be confronted with the past in fragments. Furthermore, as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992), and Janet Walker (2005) argue, because trauma can never be fully known, it is also shaped by fantasy and 'disremembering'. Walker uses the term 'disremembering' to refer to the process through which fragments of the past allow us to begin to work through trauma even when we cannot remember the original event.

Laub argues that survivors of horrific experiences cannot recognise their trauma until they testify to the events (1992: 57). Whilst video (analogue and digital) is often used to record such testimonies, it only presents the survivor telling their story – it cannot show events as they happened or illustrate memories of them. Often, particularly in the case of wars or genocides, there are few images evidencing horrendous crimes. If they do exist, they are often shot by the perpetrators, thus do not present the victims' point-of-view. This is perhaps why there has been an increasing number of animated documentaries and fictional interpretations of traumatic events such as the Holocaust told from a personal perspective. Animation helps draw attention to an individual's subjective response to events, rather than claiming to represent them as they happened. In the case of horrific events it might also be a 'means for overcoming the effacement of the past blocked by traumatic experience' (Honesty Roe 2013: 155). This is illustrated in *Waltz with Bashir*

(Folman, 2008) in which the filmmaker uses animation to try to discover his missing memories of his time as a soldier in the Lebanon War.

Another example, the short Canadian animation *I was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* (Fleming, 2010) foregrounds the complexity of memory and the significance to it of imagination. Fleming's animated film is a post-memory work (Hirsch 2012), which means it explores the relationship that a member of the second generation (Bernice Eisenstein) has with her parent's traumatic past (the Holocaust) which she did not experience first-hand. At one point in the film, Bernice tries to reconcile the image of her father as she knows him with imagery of the concentration camps and imagines him as a sheriff (as if from a Western film) fighting the Nazis. She cannot recall a past she did not experience, but she can feel affected by it and still invest imaginatively in it – remembering it from a deferred position.

However, to think about animated films that confront real experiences of trauma simply as an exchange between the testifier and the viewer is to ignore the significance of both the animators and their imagery. What we see on screen is not simply the testimony – so whose memory is it? The animators are always interpreting the interviewees' narratives, thus bringing their own imagining of the past to the representations and drawing attention to their presence as well as that of the person giving testimony (Honesty Roe 2013: 87). Furthermore, with the ubiquity of computers in our everyday lives, our media engagements are now mostly composed of a 'convergence of matter (human memory [and image]) with information (silicon memory)' (Garde-Hansen, Hoskins, Reading 2012: 13). We must not assume that digital media, including animation, offer a more complete record of the past, such as the myth of the 'total archive' (Hoskins 2009), however, the blurring of the human and machine, as well as the first-hand witness and the post-memory generations – those born after the event - in the production of animated documentaries about traumatic pasts

draw attention to the ways in which memory works as an assemblage of the organic and non-organic, and of the past and the present for the future. We can see this in the short animated documentary *My Good Fortune in Auschwitz* (*Mijn Geluk in Auschwitz*, Dosky, 2012) which uses rotoscoped images of actors performing a survivors' memories with live-action footage of the survivor telling his story, all of which were compiled by animators who did not experience this past.

Although, trauma has often been defined as something that needs to be worked through (Friedländer 1996, LaCapra 1998), the recent phenomenon of stop-motion Lego 'brickfilms' about the Holocaust on YouTube suggests that perhaps post-memory generations need to *play through* traumatic pasts in order to feel bodily invested in them (Walden, forthcoming). Whilst working through necessitates a critical distance and is most appropriate for first-hand witnesses, playing through enables those who did not experience the past in question to get close to it through bodily engagement with objects. Post-war generations' playful engagement with the Holocaust can help them to materialise their imagined memory of it (Young 2000: 42), as they take on the responsibility for remembering a past they did not experience first-hand in bodily ways. This is not to suggest that they replace their experience of playing through with factual knowledge about real events from the past, but that playing through helps them to connect to it. It is in such ways that events like the Holocaust can become part of collective, rather than just individual, memory.

Collective Memory and National Identity

The term 'collective memory', popularised by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, suggests we do not remember the past as isolated individuals, but aggregate and recollect memories as

part of a society (1992: 38). Collective memory helps to formulate our 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1996) – those groups to which we see ourselves belonging and from which others are excluded. Each community might thus share a particular memory about a historic event, which might conflict with the way another group remembers it. Thus, each community remembers its own 'version of the past' (Neiger, Meyers and Zandberg 2011: 5). Collective memory, then, is key to identity formation. Yet it does not suppress the importance of the individual, rather the notion of collective memory recognises that people share memories and help each other to remember events from the past. How then might animations speak to this discourse about collective memory?

It is possible to see how certain animations might appear to contribute to the imagining of specific communities, particularly in terms of national identity. For example, the cuddly bear-like figure *Cheburashka* became an icon of Soviet animation and has since been the official mascot for the Russian Olympic team in the respective summer and winter games of 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2010. Japanese science-fiction anime's Mecha characters often embody a renewed Japanese identity after the nation's American occupation. As Joon Yang Kim argues, *AstroBoy* (Osamu Tezuka et al, 1963-66) became a 'national icon for a dream of the reconstruction of Japan' (2013: 179). He represented not only the other becoming accepted as equal to the human rulers, but that the answer to Japan's national identity of the future would be technology (Ibid.).

Yet, if we consider collective memory to be less fixed to a specific notion of identity and more fluid, melding together the recollections and experiences of different individuals and things then we can understand animations as representing a plurality of relations to the past. Although an iconic of Soviet culture, *Cheburashka* was created by a number of Jewish Holocaust survivors working for the state animation studio in the U.S.S.R. Acknowledging

the creators' background enables one to identify small features of *Cheburashka's* story that challenge the idea that he represents a specific collective Soviet identity. His arrival in a crate of Jaffa oranges and the suitcase that he carries around point to the plight of Jewish refugees suggesting that there are a number of levels on which this figure can be read (Maya Balakirsky Katz 2016).

Whilst the anime *Akira* (Katsuhiro Ôtomo, 1988) is, as is typical of anime science fiction, concerned with ideas of the post-human in the future, it is also a film that points to group identity as something that is always in flux. *Akira* is set in a dystopic metropolis – a symbol of capitalism as corruption brought to Japan by its American occupiers - yet it amalgamates this imagery and the greed of its protagonist with ideals about masculinity which are deeply rooted in Shinto culture. Although set in the future, *Akira* explores the entanglement of different layers of the past in forming contemporary notions of Japanese identity. Indeed, the film's finale sees technology and human body amalgamate into a monstrous figure as Tetsuo is transformed, which questions the proposals made by other works such as *Astroboy* about technology as Japan's future. Technology is as much a negative import of the occupying forces (consider for example the devastating impact of Hiroshima and Nagasaka) as it is a part of Japan's future in *Akira*, as the film ends with Kaneda riding off in search of a new beginning with his high-spec motorbike. Both *Cheburashka* and *Akira* present the boundaries of collective identity as neither clearly defined nor stable, but feature an assemblage of references to different experiences of the past which speak to various notions of identity in their own times. They present identity as something constructed through the collaboration of various discourses about the past, rather than preceded on a specific collective memory. In some respects, *Akira* draws

attention to the tension between a nostalgic longing for Japan's Shinto traditions and the rapid changes of modernisation.

Nostalgia

Nostalgia has been characterised as a rose-tinted, and thus unproductive, view of the past (Bal 1999: xi). The word 'nostalgia' takes its meaning from the Greek *Nostos* – return to the native land and *Algos* – suffering of grief. Thus nostalgia combines both a longing for the past and yet a mourning for a lost time that cannot return. Although the term was originally used in the 1600s to diagnose the illness of mercenaries far from home, the cultural definition, which we are more familiar with today, gained traction in the late nineteenth century. The idea of nostalgia as a certain feeling towards the past emerged during the Enlightenment – a period of rapid modernisation, and thus many scholars have considered it in the context of a crisis of temporality. Media engagements with nostalgia 'could indicate a twofold phenomenon: a reaction to fast technologies, despite using them in desiring to slow down, and/or an escape from this crisis into a state of wanderlust and a homesickness that could be cured through media consumption' (Niemeyer 2014: 2). As such, nostalgia should not simply be dismissed as sentimentality towards the past.

Nostalgia suggests two sensations: firstly, that things are changing too rapidly, therefore we long to return to a time that seemed slower or at least more constant than the late-capitalist era with its obsessive drive towards the future. Secondly, that the present feels much disconnected from the past that we remember, and a past that we see as fundamental to shaping our personal and collective identity. Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann (2009) argue that nostalgia might not only help us to 'learn from the past but also

to recuperate real community'. Niemeyer (2014) suggests that media can play a role in offering a nostalgic, albeit temporary, cure for a desire to return to a more familiar time. There is of course a paradox, here, for it is often digital media, such as Pixar animations, that offer nostalgic value – allowing us to feel comfortable in a past we seem to recognise – whilst they are also products of modern advancement and present post-human worlds, and technologically threaten the existence of the old media forms that characterised the eras to which we often longingly look back.

The narratives of Pixar's films are usually informed by nostalgia, for example the conflict between Woody and Buzz Lightyear in *Toy Story* is suggestive of the shift between a traditional image of the American cowboy and the Space Age. In the recent *Cars 3* (Brian Fee, 2017), Lightning McQueen longs to return to the glory age of traditional racing. *WALL-E* (Andrew Stanton, 2008) takes us into a future world in which our sympathies are drawn to the titular mechanical robot, abandoned in the wastelands of Earth whilst humans are docile, living on a space cruiser on which digital technology does everything for them.

Pixar's nostalgic turn is not only rooted in its narratives, but also its films' aesthetics. As Murray and Huemann (2009) note, *WALL-E* takes influence from Charlie Chaplin films and includes clips and music from *Hello Dolly*. In *Cars 3*, Lightning McQueen looks back at his former successes in newspaper clippings – a pre-digital media form drawn in the film as digital images. Pixar films, then, often depict the paradoxical nature of mediated nostalgia as they long for a past in which they could not exist. Yet they create this past in the digital, which threatens to replace the formats, such as analogue films and newspapers, represented onscreen.

We have seen in this chapter how animated works can help us to remember the past, how they represent dimensions of memory such as trauma, post-memory and

nostalgia, and how we can look into the archives of animation production in particular nations to explore how the form contributes to the production of identities that inform collective memory. Animation is particular salient for exploring issues related to memory because it often foregrounds creativity, embodiment and the subjective, which are fundamental to memory. As animations often involve assemblages of objects and people in their creation and within their representations, they also draw attention to the complex, collaborative dimensions of memory. We do not simply remember on our own; rather our relationships with the past are shaped by our encounters with people, things, places and collectives. We must remember not to solely look at the representational values of animations, though, when thinking about memory, but interrogate their technological, material and aesthetic dimensions as well, in order to examine what the form can specifically contribute to our understanding about memory and the past.

References

Anderson, B. (2016) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London and New York: Verso.

Bal, M. (1999) 'Introduction', in M. Bal, J. Crewe and L. Spitzer (eds) *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, vii-xvii, Hanover: University Press of New England.

Barker, J.M. (2009) *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*, California: University of California.

Caruth, C. (1996) *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press.

Felman, S. and D. Laub (1992) *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Friedländer, S. (1996) 'Trauma, Transference and "Working Through" in Writing the History of the *Shoah*', *History and Memory* 4 (1), 39-59.

Garde-Hansen, J. (2011) *Media and Memory*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Garde-Hansen, J., A. Hoskins, and A. Reading (2012) 'Introduction', in *Save As ... Digital Memories*, 1-26, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Halbwachs, M. (1992) *On Collective Memory*, trans. L. A. Coser, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Hirsch, M. (2012) *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Honess Roe, A. (2013) *Animated Documentary*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hoskins, A. (2009) 'Digital Network Memory', in A. Erll and A. Rigney (eds) *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, 91-108, Berlin: de Gruyter.

Huyssen, A. (2003) *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

Katz, M.B. (2016) *Drawing the Iron Curtain: Jews and the Golden Age of Soviet Animation*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Kim, J. Y. (2013) 'The East Asian Post-Human Prometheus: Animated Mechanical "Others"', in S. Buchan (eds) *Pervasive Animation*, 172-94, New York: Routledge.

LaCapra, D. (1998) *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, New York: Cornell University.

Laub, D. (1992) 'Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening', in S. Felman and D. Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, 57-74, Abingdon: Routledge.

Landsberg, A. (2004) *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press.

McLuhan, M. (1964) *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man*, New York: McGraw-Hill.

Murray, R. L. and J. K. Heumann (2009) 'WALL-E: From Environmental Adaptation to Sentimental Nostalgia', *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 51 [access at: <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc51.2009/WallE/text.html>]

Neiger, N., O. Meyers and E. Zandberg (2011) 'Introduction', in *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age*, 1-26, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Niemeyer, K. (2014) 'Introduction: Media and Nostalgia', in *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*, 1-26, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Van Dijck, J. (2007) *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*, Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

Walden, V. G. (forthcoming) *Cinematic Intermedialities and Contemporary Holocaust Memory*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Walker, J. (2005) *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wells, P. (1998) *Understanding Animation*, London and New York: Routledge.

Young, J. E. (2000) 'David Levinthal's *Mein Kampf*: History, Toys, and the Play of Memory', in *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*, 42-61, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.